

**Coopersville Area Public Schools**  
**State of the Schools Report – Introductory Comments**  
**Monday, February 19, 2007**  
**7:00 p.m.**

To prepare for this year's State of the Schools Report, I began by looking back at how the district has fared in the nine years since I became superintendent. It was incredible to realize how much has changed in just a few short years.

Not long ago, West Elementary used to house 700 students in kindergarten through third grade, and children from both East and West had to walk to the Junior High because neither building had a library. Junior high students had to eat lunch in the wrestling room above the gym because the school didn't have a cafeteria. At the High School, students ate their lunches on the floor, the auditorium only had 350 seats, and spectators often exceeded the gym's capacity during basketball games.

Equally impressive is that every curriculum area in the district – language arts, social studies, math and so on – has been updated and will be revised on a regular basis from now on. New materials, such as textbooks, science kits and physical education equipment, were also purchased to support the changes. Thanks to the efforts of many in this community, the district's Strategic Plan charted a course for our future and remains a guiding force in all of our decisions.

Some here tonight don't remember how things used to be. Half of our teachers – 49 percent, to be exact – have been hired since February 1998. Many in our community are also new. Enrollment at CAPS continues to grow, spurred by new housing and an influx of families who want to raise their kids here. We have also seen an increase in school of choice students from families making the conscious decision to send their children to Coopersville, even though they don't live here. They are attracted by our Blue Ribbon high school, award-winning programs like Project KEEP, Steps to Success, PACER and Road Trips Before Bedtime, first-rate facilities and a rigorous curriculum rooted in strong values. By any measure – and we measure a lot these days – our schools stack up with the best.

None of this could have happened without the community's support. Each year, residents have approved the non-homestead property tax renewal, providing vital revenue. In addition, voters have passed three bond issues totaling more than \$80 million to fund campus improvements. When work is completed in three years, every building on campus will have been newly built or renovated since 1999.

Unfortunately, the last nine years have also seen the longest sustained downturn in the state's economy since the Great Depression. The district has had its funding cut for three of the last five years, and one year it remained flat. This year, CAPS received its first increase in five years, but even that is in jeopardy. Despite this,

disciplined fiscal management and increased enrollment have enabled the district's savings to go from nearly non-existent to a healthy 18 percent of revenues. While this is probably not sustainable, it is remarkable under the circumstances.

It is against this backdrop that I want to present the board with my 2007 State of the Schools Report. I'm calling this report "Moving Forward" because that's what our district is doing.

This has been a tumultuous year. First, our community was shocked to learn the Delphi plant would be closing. Then, voters approved the district's \$41 million plan to ease overcrowding by the narrowest of margins. Finally, teachers had to work for five months without a labor contract before we were able to reach a new, multi-year agreement. Amid such uncertainties, I'm pleased to say, our focus has always remained on our students.

As our enrollment grows, we will face new obstacles. We are already out of space and have to hold classes in the Administration Building and any other nook and corner we can find. I'm afraid the overcrowding will get worse before it gets better, and so I ask for your patience. The good news is that construction of the new middle school will begin this summer. While all of our space issues will not be resolved until all the building renovations are completed in 2010, exciting changes are on the horizon.

Clearly, our biggest challenge is the budget. It is painfully obvious the state's approach to school funding is simply not working. Unfortunately, individual districts cannot solve the problem, so we must look to the state for solutions. I am calling on every citizen to contact their legislators and ask them to stabilize school funding. I believe "stable" school funding should mean "equal" school funding for every child in the state. While I realize this may require some combination of cost cuts, service reductions, tax shifts or even tax increases, I believe it is the only fair thing to do for our children.

Considering everything Coopersville has accomplished, and the circumstances under which it has been done, I am giving the district straight A's this year – in every category, except, of course, school funding. Our district remains a tremendous source of pride, reflecting the values of the people who live, work and raise families here. Outsiders move here to be a part of our community, and others make sacrifices to send their children to CAPS even though they don't live here. Aspiring teachers seek us out because they appreciate the strong academic standards and moral values we foster. I hope everyone will take the time to read this report, and I challenge each of you to show our children you care by supporting our schools. Thank you.